

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE AIR FORCE ENLISTED CHEVRONS

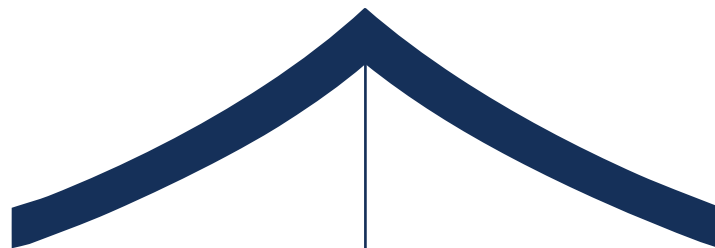
The following chronology is primarily derived from the research of TSgt Barry L. Spink, outlined in the document A Chronology of the Enlisted Rank Chevron of the United States Air Force, and published by the Air Force Historical Research Agency on 19 February 1992.¹



1. The document is available online at <http://www.afhra.af.mil/Portals/16/documents/Studies/AFD-090611-103.pdf>

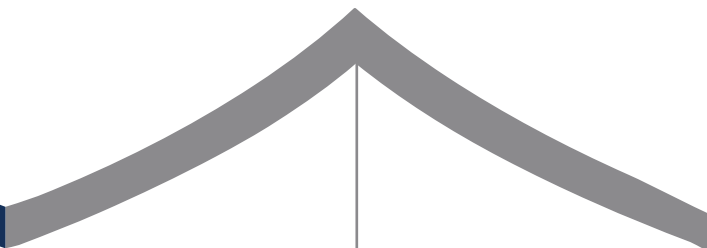
A CHRONOLOGY OF THE AIR FORCE ENLISTED CHEVRONS

18 SEPTEMBER
1947



When the Air Force became a separate service, it retained the enlisted ranks and chevrons used in the Army Air Forces (AAF) and continued to refer to the enlisted members as Soldiers.

9 MARCH
1948



Air Force leaders, including Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF), gather to approve new enlisted chevrons for the US Air Force. New chevrons had been tested at Bolling AFB, Washington, DC, and were selected by 55 percent of the Airmen who were polled to determine the preferred style of the new stripes.

Gen. Vandenberg approved the choice, and the Air Force implemented the new chevrons. There is no documentation that discusses the rationale behind the design, although some believe the stripes represent a combination between the shoulder patch worn by members of the AAF during World War II and the insignia used on aircraft. The size of the chevrons was four inches wide for men and three inches wide for women.

20 FEBRUARY
1950

24 APRIL
1952

22 SEPTEMBER
1954

SAILORS
AIRMEN
SOLDIERS

Gen. Vandenberg directs that enlisted personnel be referred to as “Airman” (singular) and Airmen (plural) to distinguish them from Soldiers, Marines, and Sailors.

The Air Force publishes Air Force Regulation 39-36, changing the names of the lower ranks and formalizing the restriction of noncommissioned officer (NCO) status to staff sergeant, technical sergeant, and master sergeant. The chevrons remained the same; however, discussion began to change the chevrons for the classes of Airmen (first, second, and third). A design was proposed with horizontal stripes, reserving the angled stripes we know today for NCOs. Gen. Vandenberg approved the new stripes in December of 1952 but ordered them not to be procured until the stock of existing chevrons was depleted. Four years later, in March 1956, the stock was depleted and the proposal to change the stripes was again submitted to the new CSAF, Gen. Nathan F. Twining. Gen. Twining disapproved the change, stating simply “No change to be made in insignia.”

Gen. Twining approves a distinctive chevron for first sergeants, adding the traditional diamond in the V above the master sergeant chevron. At that time, master sergeant was the only approved rank for first sergeants.



20 MAY
1958

Congress passes the Military Pay Act of 1958 (Public Law 85-422), authorizing two additional enlisted grades of E-8 and E-9. The primary reasons for establishing the two grades were to clarify responsibilities and authorities among the many master sergeants and to resolve enlisted retention issues due to a lack of promotion opportunities. Air Force leaders developed titles and chevrons for the new grades. Their main intent in the process was to build on the existing structure and chevrons but differentiate between the junior Airmen, the skilled sergeants, and the supervisory level ranks. Major commands provided their input,



and senior master sergeant (E8) and chief master sergeant (E9) were the most popular. There were a number of ideas for the new chevrons, including adding additional stars or diamonds to the current chevron, but the final choice was to add two additional stripes pointing in the opposite direction and superimposed on top of the current chevron. The first senior master sergeants were promoted on 1 September 1958, and the first chief master sergeants were promoted a year later.

5 FEBRUARY
1959

The Air Force releases a new governing regulation for enlisted ranks, changing the name of “basic airman” to “airman basic.”

BASIC AIRMAN
AIRMAN BASIC

3 APRIL
1967

CMSgt. Paul Airey becomes the first Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF) and dons the new CMSAF chevron. Several designs were proposed for the new chevron, including an additional stripe on top of the existing chief master sergeant chevron (6 down, 3 up). However, after CMSgt. Donald Harlow modeled the proposed chevron, Air Force leaders determined it was simply “too much.” Harlow, who at the time was working in the Executive Services Division,



Office of the Vice Chief of Staff, modeled an additional design that added a surrounding wreath around the star in the existing chief master sergeant chevron. When Air Force leaders asked Harlow which chevron he preferred, he chose the chevron with the wreath due to its simplicity.

19 OCTOBER
1967

The Air Force changes the titles and terms of address for the first four grades, restoring the NCO status to the E-4 grade. The change aligned the NCO ranks in the Air Force with those of the other services and allowed many Airmen to reach the NCO “sergeant” rank during their first enlistment, which was thought to be a factor in retention.



AIRMAN



AIRMAN FIRST CLASS



SERGEANT

1 JUNE
1976

Air Force leaders change the E-2 through E-4 grade structure to further establish a three-tier enlisted force structure (Airman, NCO, and senior NCO). The change included an additional E-4 rank of “senior Airman.” New criteria was established for senior Airman to advance to the NCO “sergeant” rank (also E-4 and often referred to as “buck sergeant”), including 12 months’ time-in-grade and completion of the NCO Preparatory Course. Additionally, the change included new chevrons for senior airman and below. The chevrons replaced the silver star in the chevron with a subdued blue star, which was often difficult to see from a distance.



SENIOR AIRMAN

12 MONTHS TIME
IN GRADE

COMPLETION OF NCO
PREPARATORY COURSE

BUCK SERGEANT

19 MARCH
1991

Gen. Merrill A. McPeak, CSAF, announces the termination of the E-4 NCO “sergeant” rank with the intent to improve the ratio of NCOs to Airmen. E-4 sergeants were allowed to continue with the rank until they were promoted to E-5 “staff sergeant” or separated from the Air Force.



OCTOBER
1991



Gen. McPeak and CMSAF Gary Pfingston reveal proposed changes to the enlisted chevrons. The proposal returned the silver star to all chevrons and moved one of the stripes from the bottom of



the master sergeant, senior master sergeant, chief master sergeant, and CMSAF chevrons and placed it at the top. After a long test and transition period, the new chevrons became mandatory on 1 October 1997.

1 NOVEMBER
1998

CSAF Gen. Michael Ryan and CMSAF Eric Benken implement the new insignia and title chief master sergeants serving in senior enlisted advisor positions. The new title was command chief master sergeant, which included a chevron with an additional star located in the blue field.



1 NOVEMBER
2004



CMSAF Gerald Murray introduces a new chevron for the CMSAF. The process to establish a new chevron began in October 2002 and included a number of design proposals. One such proposal simply moved the wreath and star to the center blue field; however, Air Force leaders felt it did not capture the spirit of the position. The Air Force needed a chevron that clearly identified its top enlisted leader but maintained the heritage of the position and chevrons. The approved chevron left the wreath and star in the lower portion of the chevron and in the middle added the U.S. American eagle insignia with two stars on either side.

**A CHRONOLOGY OF THE ENLISTED RANK CHEVRON
OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**

by TSgt Barry L. Spink
Air Force Historical Research Agency
19 February 1992

26 JULY 1947 The National Security Act of 1947 became law on 26 July 1947. It created the Department of the Air Force, headed by a Secretary of the Air Force. Under the Department of the Air Force, the act established the United States Air Force, headed by the Chief of Staff, USAF. On 18 September 1947, W. Stuart Symington became Secretary of the Air Force, and on 26 September General Carl A. Spaatz became the USAF's first Chief of Staff.¹

At the time of this transition from the U.S. Army Air Force to the United States Air Force, the enlisted rank chevrons retained the "Army look." The ranks, from lowest to highest, were as follows: Private (no stripes), Private, First Class (one inverted "V" upward stripe), Corporal or Technician Fifth Grade (two upward stripes or two upward stripes with the capital letter "T" under the stripes), Sergeant or Technician Fourth Grade (three upward stripes or three upward stripes with the capital letter "T" underneath), Staff Sergeant or Technician Third Grade (three upward stripes with one "rocker" stripe or the same with a "T" in the space between the stripes and the rocker), Technical Sergeant (three upward and two rocker stripes), Master Sergeant (three upward and three rocker stripes) and the position of First Sergeant (same as a master sergeant's stripes, but with a diamond between the upward stripes and the rocker stripes) (See Figure 1).²

9 March 1948 There is no documented official rationale for the design of the present USAF enlisted chevrons, except the minutes of a meeting held at the Pentagon on 9 March 1948, chaired by General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Air Force Chief of Staff. These minutes reveal that chevron designs were sampled at Bolling Air Force Base and the style used today was selected by 55% of 150 airmen polled. General Vandenberg therefore approved the choice of the enlisted majority.³

Whoever designed the stripes might have been trying to combine the shoulder patch worn by members of the Army Air Force (AAF) during World War II and the insignia used on aircraft. The patch featured wings with a pierced star in the center while the aircraft insignia was a star with two bars. The stripes might be the bars from the aircraft insignia slanted gracefully upward to suggest wings. The silver grey color contrasts with the blue uniform and might suggest clouds against blue sky.⁴ At this time the size of the new chevrons are determined to be four inches wide for men,

¹ Book, The Organization and Lineage of the United States Air Force, by Charles A. Ravenstein, Office of Air Force History, 1986.

² Book, The Noncom's Guide, Military Service Publishing Company, First Edition, 1948.

³ Minutes of Meeting, Uniform Presentation, 9 March 1948, Room 3E1022, National Defense Building (Pentagon); and Research Response, James N. Eastman, Jr, Chief, Research Branch, AF Historical Research Agency (AFHRA), undated.

⁴ Why is the Colonel Called "Kernal"?, The origins of the ranks and rank insignia now used by the United States armed forces, by Raymond Oliver, 1982.

three inches for women. This difference in size created the official term of "WAF (Women in the Air Force) chevrons" in reference to the three inch stripes.⁵

The rank titles, from bottom to top, are: Private (no stripe), Private First Class (one stripe), Corporal (two stripes), Sergeant (three stripes), Staff Sergeant (four stripes), Technical Sergeant (five stripes), Master Sergeant (six stripes and the only rank approved for First Sergeant Duties) (See Figure 2).⁶

20 FEBRUARY 1950 General Vandenberg directed that from this day forth, enlisted personnel of the Air Force will be called "Airmen" to distinguish them from "Soldiers" and "Sailors." Formerly, Air Force enlisted personnel were still called "Soldiers."⁷

24 April 1952 Studies made in 1950 and 1951 proposed to change the enlisted grade structure and was adopted by the Air Council and Chief of Staff in March 1952. The change was embodied in Air Force Regulation 39-36 on 24 April 1952. The primary objective desired in changing the airman grade structure was the restriction of non-commissioned officer status to a group of higher grade airmen sufficiently small in number to permit them to function as non-commissioned officers. Plans for improving the quality of non-commissioned officer leadership hinged upon this change: now that the change was made, plans for investigating and improving the quality of this leadership began.⁸

The titles of the ranks changed (although not the chevrons). The new titles, from bottom to top, are: Basic Airman (no stripe), Airman Third Class (one stripe), Airman Second Class (two stripes), Airman First Class (three stripes), Staff Sergeant (four stripes), Technical Sergeant (five Stripes) and Master Sergeant (six stripes) (See Figure 3).⁹

At this time it is planned to develop new insignia for the three classes of Airmen (First, Second, and Third). Preliminary sketches of proposed insignia have the stripes at a horizontal level, reserving the angled stripes for the top three ranks to differentiate Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs).¹⁰

⁵ Book, The Air Officer's Guide, The Military Service Publishing Company, Fifth Edition, 1951.

⁶ Air Force Letter 35-46, 8 April 1949.

⁷ Regulation, Air Force Regulation 39-36, "Designation of Air Force Enlisted Personnel As Airmen," 20 Feb 1950, on file at Air University Library, MAFB, AL.

⁸ History, Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel History 1 Jan-30 Jun 1952, pg 98 & 231, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

⁹ Regulation, Air Force Regulation 35-14B, "Military Personnel, Service and Dress Uniforms for Air Force Personnel," 7 Nov 1952; Air Force Regulation 39-36, "Enlisted Personnel, Airman Grades, Titles, and Terms of Address," 24 April 1952; both on file at Air University Library, MAFB, AL.

¹⁰ History, Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel History, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1952, pg 98, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

DECEMBER 1952 The proposed new chevrons for the three lower airman grades are approved by General Vandenberg. However, the procurement action is deferred until existing stocks of the current chevrons are depleted. This is not expected to occur until June 1955.¹¹

22 SEPTEMBER 1954 On this day the new Chief of Staff, General Nathan F. Twining, approves a new distinctive insignia for First Sergeants. It consists of a traditional diamond sewn in the "V" above the grade chevron. Recommendations for adoption of this distinctive insignia were advanced by two commands: Strategic Air Command (SAC) and Air Training Command (ATC). The suggestion from ATC was included in an appendix buried in a February 1954 ATC Personnel Planning Project, while the SAC NCO Academy, March AFB, CA, proposed the design on 30 April 1954 to the Air Council.¹²

21 SEPTEMBER 1955 The availability of the distinctive First Sergeant insignia is announced.¹³

12 MARCH 1956 In 1952 General Vandenberg approved a new chevron for Airman, First, Second and Third Classes. The purpose of this change was to increase the prestige of the Staff, Technical and Master Sergeant chevrons. The stripes were to change from the angled design to horizontal. However, due to the supply of chevrons on hand, action was delayed until supply had been deleted, which happened in early 1956. The decision to change the design was resubmitted to General Twining on 12 March 1956. The Chief replied in a short informal memo stating "No change to be made in insignia."¹⁴



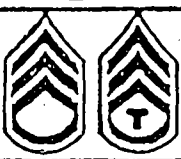



JANUARY - JUNE 1958 The Military Pay Act of 1958 (Public Law 85-422), authorized the additional grade of E-8 and E-9. No promotions to the new grades were made during Fiscal Year 1958 (July 1957 through June 1958). However, 2,000 individuals were expected to be promoted to the grade of E-8 during Fiscal Year 1959. On the other hand, in accordance with Department of Defense instructions, no promotions to grade E-9 were to be made in Fiscal Year 1959. During May and June 1958, almost 45,000 Master Sergeants from all commands were tested with the Supervisory Examination as a first step in the final selection of 2,000 for eventual promotion to E-8. This test screened out approximately 15,000 applicants, permitting approximately 30,000 to be further

¹¹ History, Semi-Annual History Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel 1 Jan-30 Jun 1955, Vol II, Pg 251, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

¹² History, Semi-Annual History Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel 1 Jul-31 Dec 1954, Vol II, pgs 261, 262, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

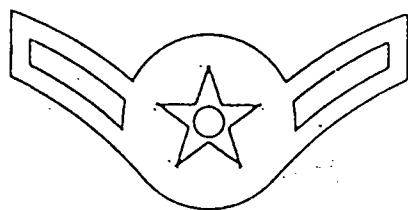
¹³ History, Staff History, Directorate of Military Personnel, 1 Jul-31 Dec 1955, pg 42, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

¹⁴ History, Directorate of Military Personnel, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1956, Vol II, pg. 346, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

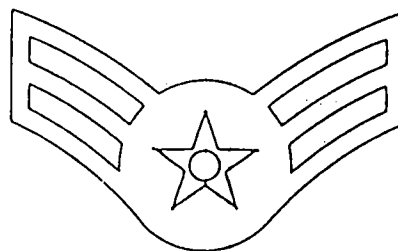
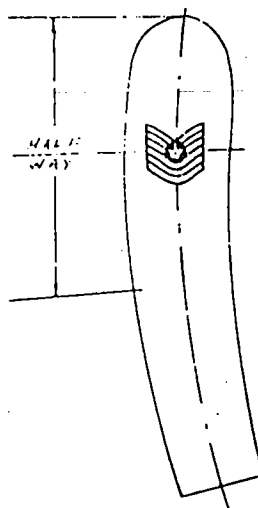
FIRST GRADE		MASTER SERGEANT AND FIRST SERGEANT
SECOND GRADE		TECHNICAL SERGEANT
THIRD GRADE		STAFF SERGEANT AND TECHNICIAN THIRD GRADE
FOURTH GRADE		SERGEANT AND TECHNICIAN FOURTH GRADE
FIFTH GRADE		CORPORAL AND TECHNICIAN FIFTH GRADE
SIXTH GRADE		PRIVATE, FIRST CLASS
SEVENTH GRADE		PRIVATE

Chevrons (Insignia of Grade) for Army Enlisted Men.

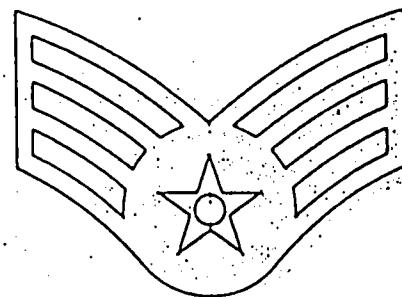
FIGURE 1



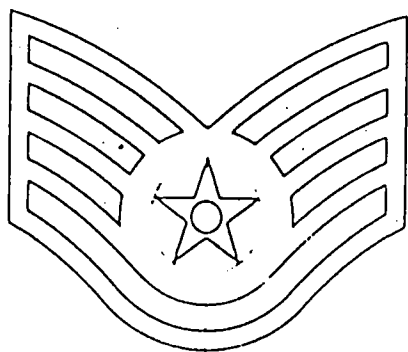
PRIVATE FIRST CLASS



CORPORAL



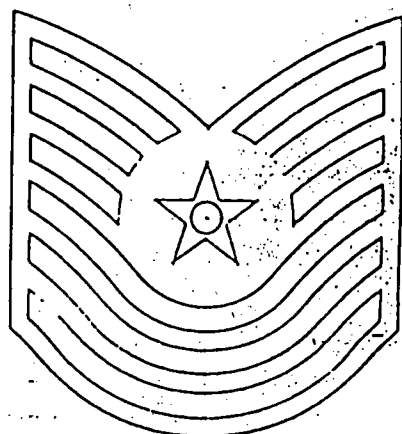
SERGEANT



STAFF SERGEANT



TECHNICAL SERGEANT



FIRST AND MASTER SERGEANT

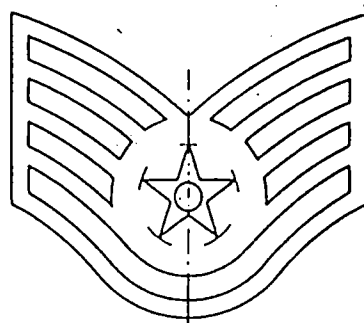
FIGURE 2



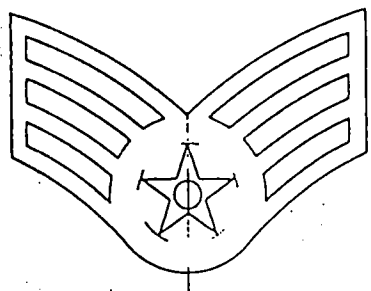
MASTER SERGEANT



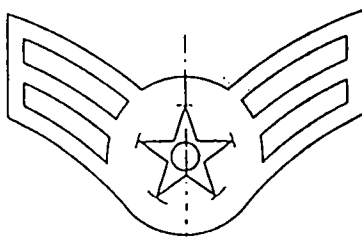
TECHNICAL SERGEANT



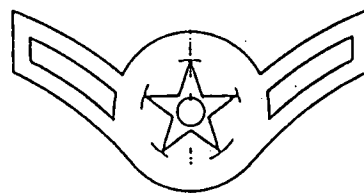
STAFF SERGEANT



AIRMAN FIRST CLASS



AIRMAN SECOND CLASS



AIRMAN THIRD CLASS

FIGURE 3

screened by command boards from which 2,000 would be selected initially.¹⁵

JULY-DECEMBER 1958 The two new grades (E-8 and E-9) were particularly welcome in that they would relieve the "compression" in the grade of Master Sergeant. However, because the numbers had to come out of the former Master Sergeant authorization, no improvement in promotion opportunity resulted to the overall enlisted structure. It was, nevertheless, an excellent solution to the problem of differentiation in the levels of responsibility among Master Sergeants. For instance, in the maintenance Table of Organization for a tactical fighter squadron, four flight chiefs, two inspectors, and the line chief all held the grade of Master Sergeant. The new grades would allow the top supervisor a grade superior to the others, each of whom had substantial responsibilities of his own.

Adding two new grades did present some problems. Most significant was the fact that of the total nine grades, five were to be at the "Sergeant" level. Up to 40% of the total enlisted structure would be in these five grades. For this reason, the older breakout of "Airmen" and "Sergeants" seemed outmoded. It was apparent that, with a near 1-to-1 ratio between Airmen and Sergeants, not all Sergeants could be supervisors. It was considered that the time had come to effect some differentiation between the less skilled Airmen, the more skilled at the Staff and Technical Sergeant level, and the supervisory level.

The speed with which it was necessary to implement the legislation did not permit a complete review of the enlisted structure. It was, therefore, determined that, for the present, the titles and insignia should blend into the system with the least possible change.

The comments of the major commands were solicited and the titles of Senior Master Sergeant (E-8) and Chief Master Sergeant (E-9) were the most popular. They were considered to be the best in clearly indicating ascending grade and to have the advantage of not reflecting unfavorably on those long-time Master Sergeants who would not be selected for the new grades.

Since it had been decided to build on the existing insignia pattern rather than to revise the whole series, the problem of a satisfactory insignia became acute. Numbers of ideas were considered. Some of those discarded were: the use of the Master Sergeant insignia superimposing one and two stars (rejected because of the overlapping of general officer's insignia); and the same with lozenges (rejected out of confusion with the First Sergeant insignia). The choice was finally, and reluctantly, narrowed to a pattern which superimposed on the older Master Sergeant Insignia, one and two additional stripes pointing in the opposite direction (upward) leaving a field of blue between the lower Master Sergeant insignia and the stripes of the new grades. While this did not

¹⁵ History, History of Directorate of Personnel Planning Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1958, pgs 84, 123, 129, and 130. AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

solve the problem of "zebra stripes," the solution was accompanied with the recommendation that the whole matter of revising the enlisted structure as to titles and insignia be studied. No complaints were voiced over the new rank insignia (See Figure 4 and 5).¹⁶

5 FEBRUARY 1959 On this day the new regulation governing the titles of the various enlisted ranks is released. The only change concerns E-1s. Instead of the title "Basic Airman," the new regulation directs that "Airman Basic" is now the proper title.¹⁷

15 MAY 1959 A new edition of Air Force Manual 35-10 is published. It addresses an inequity to the enlisted force. At the time of the creation of the Air Force, formal evening uniforms were considered the provenance of the officer corps. At the time no one seriously believed enlisted personnel would have a need nor a desire for stately uniforms. Therefore, all regulations governing the proper wear only addressed officers. Soon, however, enlisted people made their needs known and by 1959 the uniform manual caught up with the reality of the situation. While the black formal evening dress uniform was strictly for officers only, the dress white uniform was authorized for optional purchase and wear by all enlisted personnel. For the enlisted men, the insignia of grade was regulation size (four inches) with white chevrons on a white background. For the enlisted women, the same held true except the white chevrons were three inches wide. These white chevrons were used until the white dress uniform was discontinued in 1971.¹⁸

28 FEBRUARY 1961 A lightweight all tan uniform (shade 505) was approved by the uniform board. However, only three inch "WAF chevrons" were to be worn on the shirt. This necessitated a change of name. Since men were now wearing the "WAF chevrons," the official name of the three inch wide stripes became "small size."¹⁹

12 JUNE 1961 A new edition of Air Force Manual 35-10 revealed a new optional uniform for the enlisted ranks: the black Mess Dress Uniform. Previously prohibited from wearing the black formal wear, the new black mess dress brought about the need for chevrons with aluminum metallic on black background. These embroidered stripes are still in use for the mess dress at the

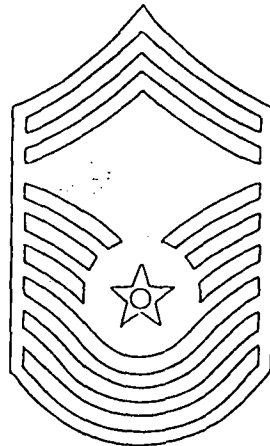
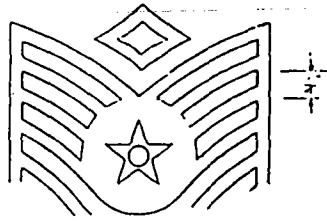
¹⁶ History, Directorate of Personnel Planning Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel 1 Jul-31 Dec 1957, pgs 32-34, 80-81, 106, and 117-118, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

¹⁷ Regulation, Air Force Regulation 39-36, "Enlisted Personnel, Airman Grades, Titles, and Terms of Address," 5 Feb 1959, on file at Air University Library, MAFB, AL.

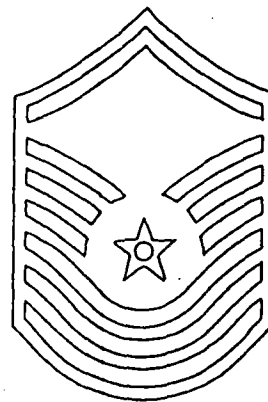
¹⁸ Manual, Air Force Manual 35-10, "Service and Dress Uniforms for Air Force Personnel," pgs 20, 38, 15 May 1959.

¹⁹ History, Deputy Chief of Staff, Systems and Logistics Directory of Supply and Services, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1961, Vol III, K144.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

FIRST SERGEANT'S DEVICE (DIAMOND)



CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT



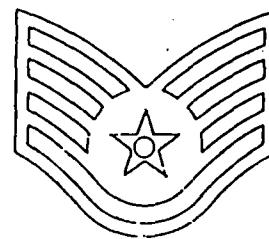
SENIOR MASTER SERGEANT



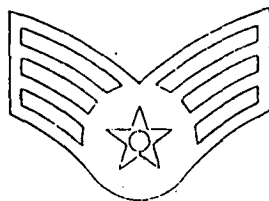
MASTER SERGEANT



TECHNICAL SERGEANT



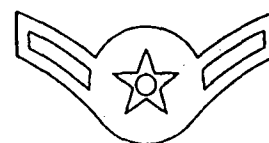
STAFF SERGEANT



AIRMAN FIRST CLASS



AIRMAN SECOND CLASS



AIRMAN THIRD CLASS

FIGURE 4

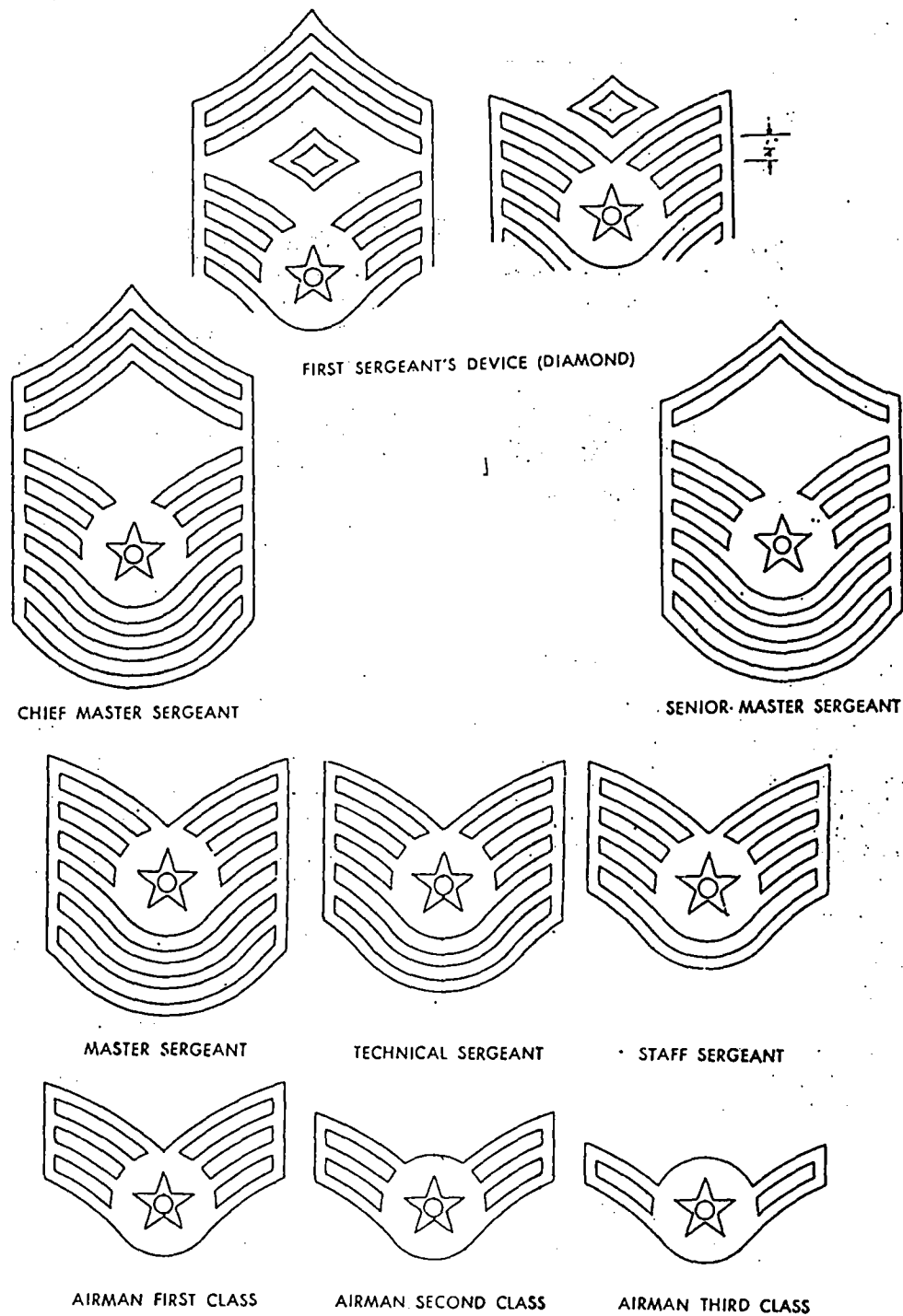


FIGURE 5

present time (February 1992).²⁰

19 SEPTEMBER 1966 The uniform board received an unusual request concerning enlisted stripes on this day. The request was to authorize wear of standard chevrons with a red center for the star to denote airmen who had successfully completed upgrade training to the next skill level but had not been promoted to the next rank. The board members acknowledged that appropriate action should be taken to recognize such an achievement; however, the method proposed to identify skill level and rank with one insignia was not considered to be the appropriate way. The board disapproved the request and General John P. McConnell, USAF Chief of Staff, agreed.²¹

JANUARY 1967 Creation of the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF) with its own distinctive insignia. An option considered for the new stripes was the addition of a third stripe atop the normal Chief Master Sergeant chevrons, but that was rejected as "too much" after Chief Master Sergeant Donald L. Harlow (later to be the second CMSAF) modeled the proposal before the Air Staff. Ultimately, on 3 March 1967, a star encircled by a wreath on the interior field of the stripes was settled upon (See Figure 6).²²

22 AUGUST 1967 On this day the uniform board started to explore methods to affix enlisted rank insignia on the raincoat.²³ This problem will perplex the board until 1974.

OCTOBER 1967 During October 1967, General McConnell directed that methods for affixing chevrons to the standard Air Force raincoat be explored. A method of placing chevrons to the raincoat was demonstrated by representatives from the Air Force Clothing Laboratory, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. This proposal was considered too complicated and involved for ready application. The search for proper chevrons for the raincoat continued.²⁴

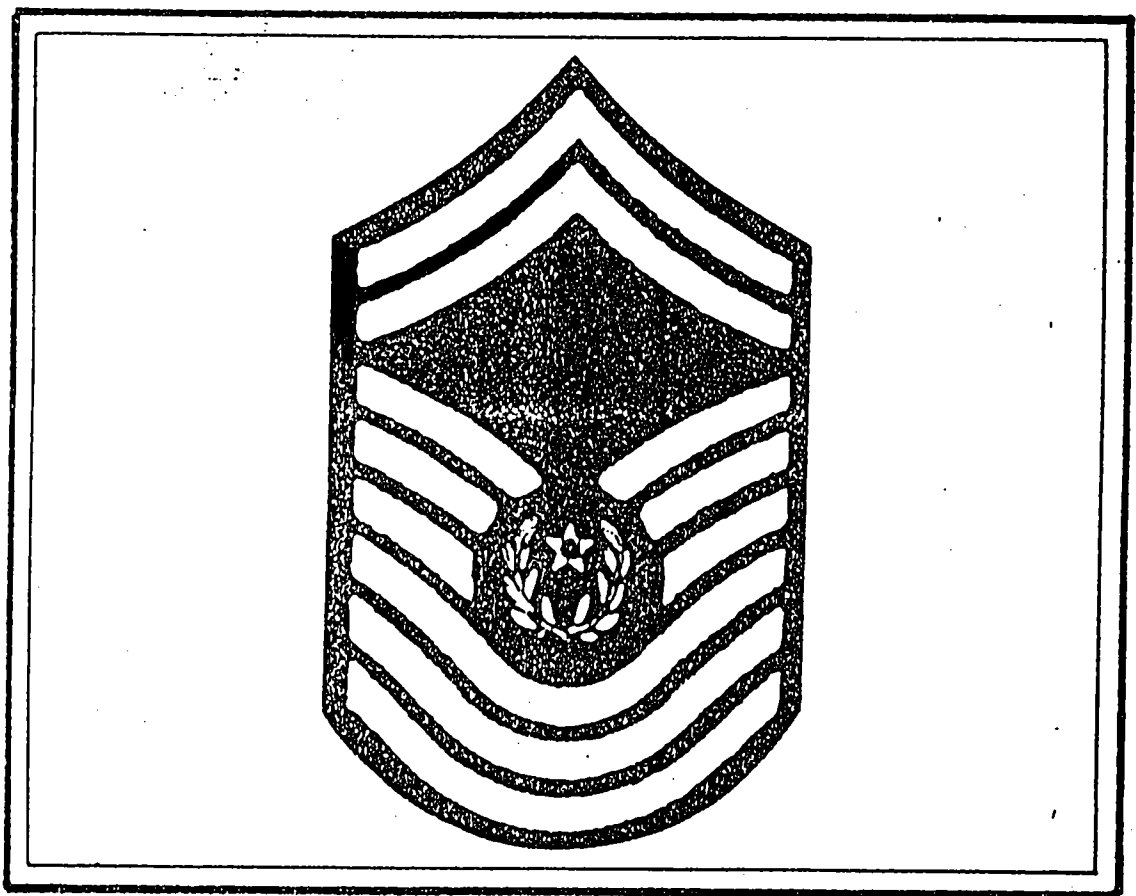
²⁰ Manual, Air Force Manual 35-10, "Service and Dress Uniforms for Air Force Personnel," 12 Jun 1961, on file at Air University Library.

²¹ History, Historical Summary for the Directorate of Supply & Services, Jul-Dec 1966, Vol II, pgs 101, 102, K144.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

²² The Chiefs, Aerospace Heritage, Vol 1, No 1, 1984, the Air Force Association, presented by the Enlisted Council of the Air Force Association; History, Historical Summary for the Directorate of Supply & Services, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1967, Vol II, pg. 90, K144.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

²³ History, Historical Summary for the Directorate of Supply & Services, 1 Jul-31 Dec 1967, Vol II, pg. 112, K144.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

²⁴ History, Historical Summary for the Directorate of Supply and Services, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1968, Vol I, pg. 110, K144.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.



Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Chevron.

FIGURE 6

19 OCTOBER 1967 Airman grades, titles and terms of address were revised to make the following changes and to restore NCO status to grade E-4: Airman Basic (no stripes), Airman (one stripe), Airman First Class (two stripes), Sergeant (three stripes), Staff Sergeant through Chief Master Sergeant, and First Sergeants, no change (See Figure 7).²⁵

The change of title for pay grade E-4 from Airman First Class to Sergeant restored the NCO status lost to this grade in 1952 when the Air Force adopted new titles. The elevation of E-4 to NCO status also aligned Air Force grades with the other services, and recognition of the level of qualification and performance required of airmen in grade E-4. Airmen could not be promoted to E-4 until qualified at the 5-skill level, exactly the qualification required for promotion to Staff Sergeant. As a side benefit, the prestige gained from restoring NCO status and privileges to the E-4 grade came at a time when airmen were approaching their first reenlistment point. At the time the Air Force was experiencing drastic losses as many did not reenlist. It was thought that achieving NCO status at the end of the first enlistment would aid in retention.²⁶

25 NOVEMBER 1969 The uniform board met on this day and approved the wear of the black background chevrons with aluminum color stripes and star on the white mess jacket and the informal white uniform coat in lieu of the authorized white-on-white chevrons. The white-on-white chevrons were allowed to be worn until 1 January 1971, at which time the black chevrons on those uniforms would be mandatory. The white-on-white stripes had been in use since 1959.²⁷

11 AUGUST 1970 The uniform board directed that enlisted personnel will wear three inch chevrons on the tan 1505 short-sleeve shirts.²⁸

4 DECEMBER 1970 In search of an appropriate chevron for enlisted personnel to wear on their raincoats, the uniform board approved the concept of allowing a plastic rank insignia to be worn on the collar. In addition, the use of such a plastic chevron was

²⁵ Regulation, Air Force Regulation 39-36, "Enlisted Personnel Airman Grades, Titles, and Terms of Address," 19 Oct 1967, on file at Air University Library, MAFB, AL.

²⁶ History, History of Directorate of Personnel Planning Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel, 1 Jul-31 Dec 1967, Vol II, pgs 89-90, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

²⁷ History, Directorate of Supply & Services Historical Summary, 1 Jul-31 Dec 1969, Vol II, pg. 130, K144.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

²⁸ History, Historical Summary for the Directorate of Supply & Services, 1 Jul-31 Dec 1970, Vol II, pg. 88, K144.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

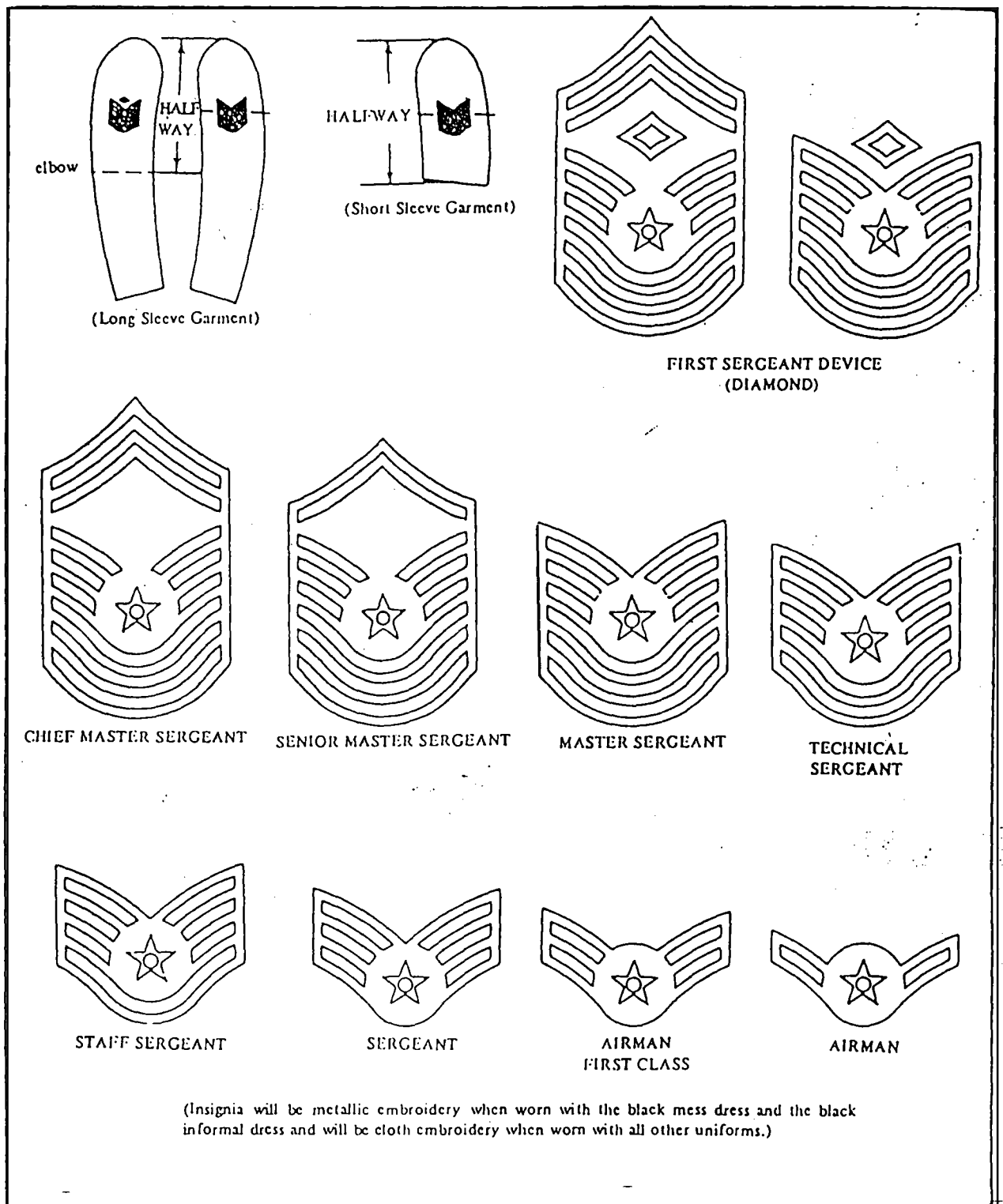


FIGURE 7

widen for use on the lightweight blue jacket and utility shirt.²⁹

21 SEPTEMBER 1971 After various reactions to the plastic chevrons, the uniform board recommended further field testing, using both plastic and metal collar chevrons on the men's and women's raincoat, lightweight blue jacket, topcoat, utility shirt and organizational white medical uniforms.³⁰

23 AUGUST 1974 General David C. Jones, the USAF Chief of Staff, approved the wear of metal collar chevrons by enlisted personnel on the raincoats, men's optional topcoat, lightweight blue jacket, medical and dental whites and the food handler's coat. This ended a seven year debate begun in 1967. However, General Jones stressed that the use of traditional sleeve chevrons on other uniforms be maintained to the maximum extent practical.³¹

30 DECEMBER 1975 The E-2 through E-4 rank chevrons were reviewed in December 1975 during a CORONA TOP meeting which examined a proposed three tier enlisted force organization. A new criteria for advancement to NCO status was decided and announced to the major commands on 30 December 1975. A key aspect of the new program was a new insignia for Senior Airmen and below. The insignia would sport a blue star instead of a silver star in the center of the chevrons (See Figure 8).³²

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1976 To institute the change by 1 March 1976, liaison with the Institute of Heraldry and the Army and Air Force Exchange Service began to insure that the new insignia would be readily available. However, there was difficulty in obtaining the new blue-star chevrons because of normal lead time required by the garment industry to change to the new insignia. On 27 January 1976 the Institute of Heraldry advised the garment industry of the new Air Force requirements, and by 12 February 1976 Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) Pentagon Liaison Office advised the Air Force that the insignia sources would be ready to supply by 1 March as desired.

However, late in February it was obvious that the garment industry could not support the 1 March date. Therefore, major commands were notified by Headquarters Air Force to postpone the

²⁹ History, Historical Summary for the Directorate of Supply & Services, 1 Jul-31 Dec 1970, Vol II, pg. 91, K144.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

³⁰ History, Historical Summary for the Directorate of Supply & Services, 1 Jul-31 Dec 1971, Vol I, pg. 75, K144.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

³¹ History, Historical Summary, Directorate of Maintenance Engineering & Supply, 1 Jul-31 Dec 1974, Vol II, pg. 132, K144.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

³² History, Directorate of Personnel Plans Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel, 1 Jul-31 Dec 1975, Vol IV, pg 38, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

implementation of the new rank until 1 June 1976.³³

1 JUNE 1976 Because of the difficulty encountered in obtaining the new insignia at all bases throughout the Air Force, Consolidated Base Personnel Offices were requested to insure that Base Clothing Stores and Base Exchanges were taking action to insure availability of the new insignia to meet requirements at their installation. The situation was complicated by the transfer of responsibility for Military Clothing Sales to the Army and Air Force Exchange Service during this period. The final result was a decision for AAFES to "force-feed" the requirements for each base directly to the Defense Personnel Service Center for the first 90 days following implementation on 1 June 1976.³⁴

JUNE 1976 In June 1976, various proposals for a distinctive uniform insignia item for the top-three NCOS grades were provided to the major commands for comment. The major commands concurred with three proposals: (1) An additional overstripe for the top three, (2) an optional shoulder mark (board) with embroidered grade insignia on shirts with epaulets, and (3) use of miniature grade insignia on the collar of the short sleeve shirt. The Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Thomas N. Barnes, disagreed. He did not perceive any "grass roots" support for an insignia change. Consequently, General Jones, the Chief of Staff, placed the proposals in a "hold" status. However, continuing support for some sort of distinctive insignia for the top three brought about a reevaluation of the shoulder mark (board) style of insignia. This proposal was still being staffed by the end of 1976.³⁵

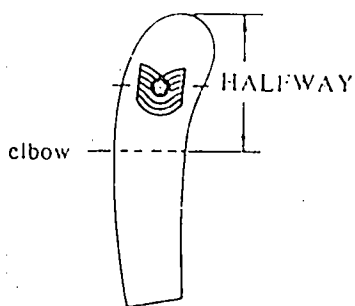
28 FEBRUARY 1980 The Vice Chief of Staff, General Robert C. Mathis, directed the suspension of airmen wearing grade insignia by students undergoing Basic Military Training. The wearing of stripes by E-2s and E-3s while undergoing Basic Military Training had an adverse impact on training since some trainees were in a position of outranking student leaders who were appointed by instructors. Suspension of the wear of grade insignia was also applied to enlisted personnel while in a training status during Officer Training School (OTS) and Airmen Education and Commissioning Program (AECIP).³⁶

³³ History, Directorate of Personnel Plans Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1976, Vol IV, pgs 35-37, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

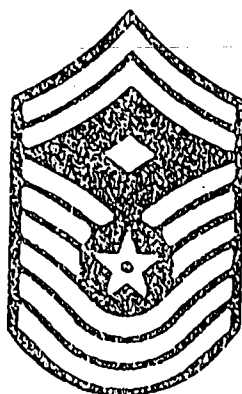
³⁴ History, Directorate of Personnel Plans Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel, 1 Jan-31 Jun 1976, Vol IV, pgs 35-37, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

³⁵ History, Directorate of Personnel Plans Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel, 1 Jul-31 Dec 1976, Vol IV, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

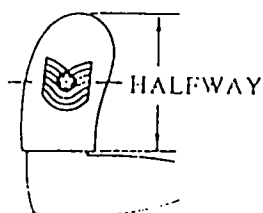
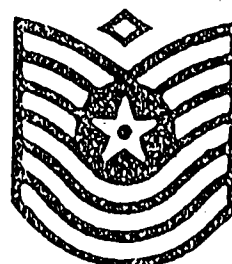
³⁶ History, Directorate of Personnel Plans Deputy Chief of Staff, Manpower and Personnel, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1980, SL 1, pg. 66, K141.01, AFHRA, MAFB, AL.



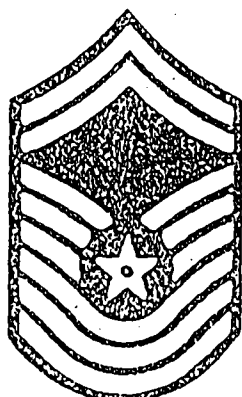
Center chevron halfway between shoulder seam and elbow when elbow is bent at 90 degree angle on long-sleeved garment.



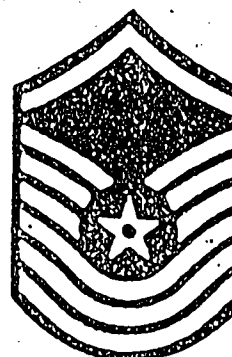
FIRST SERGEANT DEVICE
(DIAMOND)



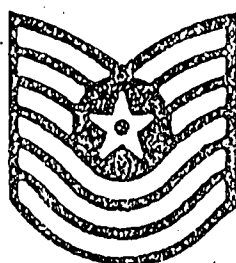
Center chevron halfway between shoulder seam and bottom of sleeve on short-sleeved garment.



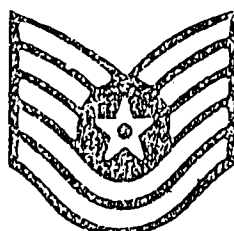
CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT



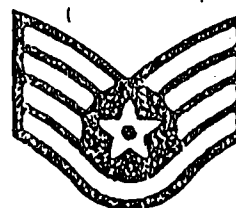
SENIOR MASTER SERGEANT



MASTER SERGEANT



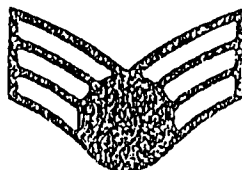
TECHNICAL SERGEANT



STAFF SERGEANT



SERGEANT



SENIOR AIRMAN



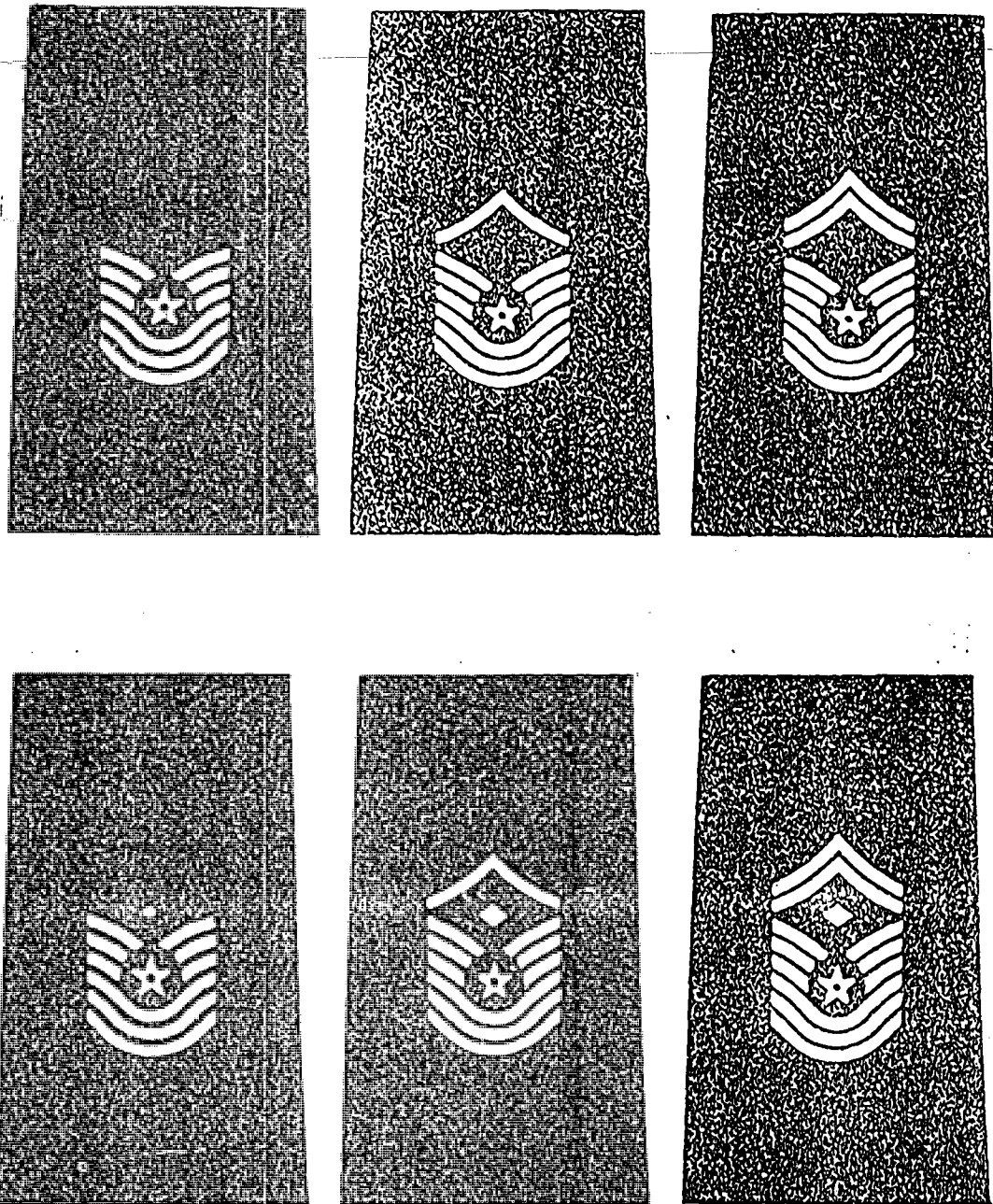
AIRMAN FIRST CLASS



AIRMAN

(Sleeve insignia are silver-colored embroidery when worn with the mess dress and the ceremonial dress uniforms and are cloth embroidery when worn with all other uniforms.)

FIGURE 8



★NOTE: Shoulder mark insignia are available in several sizes. Wear the appropriate size shoulder mark insignia that fits best on the epaulet, shirt, blouse, or pullover sweater.

Senior NCO and First Sergeant Shoulder Mark Insignia.

FIGURE 9

NEW INSIGNIA FOR THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE STRIPES



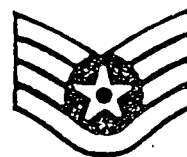
AIRMAN



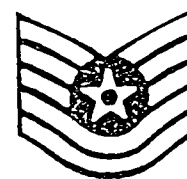
AIRMAN
FIRST CLASS



SENIOR
AIRMAN



STAFF
SERGEANT



TECHNICAL
SERGEANT



MASTER
SERGEANT



SENIOR
MASTER
SERGEANT



CHIEF
MASTER
SERGEANT



CHIEF
MASTER
SERGEANT
OF THE
AIR FORCE

FIGURE 10

25 FEBRUARY 1982 After over five years of staffing, Interim Message Change 82-1 to Air Force Regulation 35-10 allows the top-three enlisted ranks to wear shoulder mark (board) insignia for shirts with epaulets and the pullover sweater. Until the shoulder mark (board) insignia became available, the top-three ranks were allowed to wear metal grade chevrons on the epaulets of the pullover sweater (See Figure 9).³⁷

19 MARCH 1991 General Merril McPeak, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, announced the termination of the E-4 NCO (Sergeant) status, effective 2 May 1991. In place since October 1967, the removal of NCO status for E-4s was due to a number of reasons. Officials cited that with fewer enlisted accessions (due to the mandated drawdown of personnel ordered by the U.S. Congress) ratio between NCOs and Airmen was off balance. Seventy-seven percent of the enlisted force were NCOs, with the E-4 Sergeants accounted for 28 percent of the NCO corps. Yet less than half of them were in positions of responsibility. By dropping NCO status of E-4s, General McPeak believed the Air Force would have a better ratio of NCOs to Airmen. Those in the rank of E-4 Sergeant would continue in that capacity until promoted to Staff Sergeant or separated from the Air Force.³⁸ This action brought Staff Sergeants back as the first level NCO grade as it had been in 1952 through 1967. In addition, a reduction of E-4 Sergeants would reduce the NCO strength of the enlisted force to 52 percent. The reduced Air Force budget also had a share in the demise of the appointment ceremony from E-4 Senior Airman to E-4 Sergeant. Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Gary Pfingston cited the cost savings by eliminating the monthly NCO status appointment program.³⁹

OCTOBER 1991 General McPeak and Chief Pfingston revealed new proposed enlisted insignia. The chevrons could be worn on both the service dress and mess dress uniforms, eliminating the need for a separate, embroidered and expensive mess dress chevron. The proposal also returned the silver star back to all enlisted ranks and modified the top three sergeant stripes. Specifically, one stripe would be taken off the bottom and put at the top starting with master sergeant. Senior master sergeant would have two stripes up with five down and chief, three up and five down (See Figure 10).⁴⁰

³⁷ Message, HQ AFMPC to et al, "Interim Message Change 82-1 to AFR 35-10, 18 Jul 80," 25 Feb 82; Message, HQ AFMPC to et al, "Interim Message Change 82-2 to AFR 35-10, 18 Jul 80," 6 Aug 82, on file at the Air University Library, MAFB, AL.

³⁸ Message, CMSAF Washington DC to ALMAJCOM, "Termination of the E-4 NCO Status Appointment Program," 19 Mar 1991, on file at AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

³⁹ Message, Air Force News Service to et al, "Enlisted Structure Change," 20 Mar 1991, on file at AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

⁴⁰ News release, Air Force News Service, "AF Unveils New Test Uniforms," by TSgt Sarah L. Hood, Maxwell-Gunter Dispatch (base newspaper), 8 Nov 1991, on file at AFHRA, MAFB, AL.

Admittedly, there was mixed reaction to the new stripes from those in the field, reminiscent of the 1967 reaction to the proposed Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force chevron: "Too much!" The justification for the change, as provided by General McPeak, was to bring the insignia more in line with that worn by top enlisted members in the Army and Marine Corps. Adverse initial reaction from the "troops in the field" may have been due not only to the extra stripe on top, but also the size. The proposed insignia grew from three to three and a half inches in width. In addition, bold white stripes instead of the silver tinted stripes gave the chevrons an even larger look.⁴¹

FEBRUARY 1992 At this time the wear-testing of the new chevrons were still being conducted and the ultimate fate of the new design is unknown.

⁴¹ Article, Sergeants Magazine, "The New Look," Jan/Feb 1992, pgs 18, 19.